

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9004

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 2191

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS MO

SUBJECT: MOROCCAN MINISTERIAL SHIFT

1. GOM ANNOUNCED MAY 11 FOLLOWING MINISTERIAL SHIFT MOHAMED BENHIMA IS RELIEVED OF HIS FUNCTIONS AS MINISTER OF INTERIOR FOR HEALTH REASONS, AND IS REPLACED BY FORMER MINISTER OF EDUCATION MOHAMED HADDOU ECHIGUER. KING' S DIRECTOR OF CABINET, DEY OULD SIDI BABA, REPLACES ECHIGUER AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION; HIS REPLACEMENT AS DIRECTOR OF ROYAL CABINET TO BE NAMED " FORTHWITH", ACCORDING TO GOM ANNOUNCEMENT.

2. COMMENT: BENHIMA HAS BEEN RUMORED ILL, AND THERE IS NOTHING IMPLAUSIBLE ABOUT HIS RESIGNATION FOR HEALTH REASONS. IN CEREMONY INSTALLING ECHIGUER AND SIDI BABA IN THEIR NEW FUNCTIONS, KING MADE POINT OF SAYING THAT BENHIMA WOULD RETURN TO GOVERNMENT AS SOON AS HIS HEALTH PERMITS, AND PRAISED HIM FOR HIS " EXEMPLARY PROBITY". NEVERTHELESS THERE ARE INEVI- TABLE RUMORS CIRCULATING IN RABAT AROUND HIS DEPARTURE, ALLEGING ROYAL DISPLEASURE WITH BENHIMA. ACCORDING TO ONE, KING DRESSED BENHIMA DOWN FOR LAXITY OF MIN INT SERVICES IN PERMITTING " L' OPINION" PHOTOGRAPHER AND JOURNALIST TO TAKE PICTURE OF
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KING' S SON, THREE- YEAR OLD MOULAY RACHID. PHOTO,
WHICH PUBLISHED IN MAY 4 EDITION OF " L' OPINION",
SHOWS A CHILD, WHO UNIDENTIFIED BUT COULD BE MEMBER
ROYAL FAMILY, LOOKING CURIOUSLY AT WOMAN BEGGING IN
DOWNTOWN RABAT STREET. IT NOT CLEAR WHY ROYAL CHILD
WOULD BE IN SUCH LOCATION. BOTH JOURNALISTS INVOLVED
WERE LATER ARRESTED AND ARE APPARENTLY STILL BEING
HELD. ANOTHER STORY IS THAT THIS RESIGNATION IS RESULT
OF DISPUTE WITH SECURITY CHIEF DLIMI. SOURCE CLOSE TO
BENHIMA HOWEVER, HAS CORROBORATED PUBLIC ACCOUNT, I. E., THAT
BENHIMA TIRED AND HAVING HEART TROUBLE AND WE INCLINED
TO ACCEPT THIS, ALTHOUGH KING' S DISPLEASURE MAY HAVE
BEEN CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN TIMING OF DEPARTURE.

3. APPOINTMENT OF ECHIGUER, A BERBER, TO HEAD MINISTRY OF
INTERIOR MAY REFLECT KING' S NEW- FOUND CONCERN FOR HIS
BERBER CONSTITUENCY. OULD SIDI BABA HAS NO
PARTICULAR QUALIFICATION FOR EDUCATION JOB.
ROCKWELL

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*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

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